

# The Path To Follow

A Hevrat Pinto Publication

Matot

401

Under the Direction of Rabbi David H. Pinto Shlita

[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org) | [hevratpinto@aol.com](mailto:hevratpinto@aol.com)

Editor-in-Chief: Hanania Soussan

32 rue du Plateau 75019 Paris, France • Tel: +331 48 03 53 89 • Fax: +331 42 06 00 33

Tamuz 21<sup>st</sup>, 5771

July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

## Learning From The Destruction Of The Temple

It is written, "The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had very abundant livestock. ... The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and said to Moshe.... 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan.' Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?' " (*Bamidbar* 32:1-6).

In reality, why did Moshe not let the children of Gad and Reuven immediately tell him what they wanted? Instead, he interrupted and reprimanded them. Could anyone think that they did not want to enter Eretz Israel, and that they were rebelling against Hashem as their fathers had done?

We need to understand something else: The cities in question were found among the territory of Sihon and Og, and no one was living there after they were conquered. Therefore why did Moshe not annex them to Eretz Israel, in which case this dispute would never have occurred?

We may explain this in the light of Mussar. Since this passage is always read between Tammuz 17 and Av 9, it has a connection to the destruction of the Temple, and we must learn a lesson from it.

### The Humility of Rabbi Zechariah

The Gemara states that someone once held a feast for the Sages of Jerusalem. His servant, however, mistakenly invited his enemy to the feast, a man by the name of Bar Kamtza. When the host learned of this, he turned to Bar Kamtza and told him to leave. Despite Bar Kamtza's supplications to be seated, the host refused and utterly humiliated him. Bar Kamtza was filled with rage and said, "Since the Sages saw how this man humiliated me, and yet said nothing, I will go to the emperor!" He therefore went before the Roman emperor, who ruled Jerusalem, and said to him: "The Jews are rebelling against you!" The emperor asked, "How do you know?" He said, "Send me to them with an offering for the Temple. I can assure you that they will not offer it upon the altar." The emperor sent his offering, and on the way to Jerusalem Bar Kamtza made a blemish on it, one considered a blemish only by the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, the *kohanim* wanted to offer it on the altar for the sake of peace. Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas objected, arguing: "People will say that blemished animals are offered upon the altar." It was then suggested that Bar Kamtza be killed, so he could not inform on them to the emperor. Yet Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them, "Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?" Bar Kamtza returned to Rome and described what happened to the emperor, who sent his armies against Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Hence Rabbi Yochanan said, "By the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas, our House is destroyed, our Temple burned, and we ourselves exiled from our land" (*Gittin* 55b-56a). Elsewhere we find that the Sages said, "Why was the Second Temple destroyed, since in its time people occupied themselves with studying Torah, observing *mitzvot*, and practicing charity? Because of the prevalence of baseless hatred" (*Yoma* 9b). This requires an explanation, for if the Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred in Israel, it was not the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas that destroyed it. How can we reconcile these two explanations, which appear to contradict one another?

The Sages attending the feast witnessed their host humiliating Bar Kamtza, but they did not say a word. Yet afterwards, when a blemished animal was presented to them, everyone began to discuss the case, with some permitting and others prohibiting it as an offering. When that happened, the Attribute of Justice attacked them by saying:

"When these Sages saw their host humiliating a fellow Jew on account of baseless hatred, they remained silent and did not say anything to him. They did not reprimand him for humiliating another Jew in public. Yet now that humiliation is no longer the issue, but rather an offering, they do not remain silent. Some permit it as an offering, while others forbid it. As long as there are disputes among them, they are not worthy of dwelling in their land."

If they had remained silent when the blemished animal was presented to them, we could have said that they did not know how to reprimand. However since they reprimanded in one case but not the other, they were culpable. A decree was immediately enacted and the Roman emperor sent his legions against them. Not long afterwards, the Temple was destroyed and the Children of Israel were sent into captivity.

This is why Rabbi Yochanan said that the humility of Rabbi Zechariah is what destroyed the Temple. Without his humility, the blemished animal would have been offered, and the Attribute of Justice could not have said a word.

### Until the Other Has Forgiven Him

A person must always be careful in terms of his relationship with others, even more than in his relationship with G-d. The proof is that if a person repents for his sins against G-d, he is forgiven on Yom Kippur. Yet for the sins that a person commits against his fellowman, even if he repents and confesses, Yom Kippur does not atone for them unless the other has forgiven him (*Yoma* 85b). Hashem is lenient for the sins that a person commits against Him, but not for the sins that a person commits against others.

Since the Sages have said that Eretz Israel is only acquired through hardship (*Berachot* 5a), Moshe did not annex the territory of Sihon and Og, for it was not acquired through hardship like Eretz Israel. When the children of Gad and Reuven said to him, "Do not bring us across the Jordan," he believed that they did not want to endure hardship like the rest of the Children of Israel, and that they wanted to settle in the territory of Sihon and Og, which is not acquired through hardship. Hence Moshe immediately interrupted them and said, "Do you think that you can settle down in peace and not concern yourself with the fact that the rest of the Jewish people are suffering for Eretz Israel? Will your brothers go out to war while you dwell here?" This teaches us that Moshe was afraid that there was no peace among them, and there can be no greater division than when one person is not concerned with another.

The children of Gad and Reuven immediately replied, "We ourselves will go armed before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place, and our little ones will live in the fortified cities before the inhabitants of the land" (*Bamidbar* 32:17). This means that they took it upon themselves to share in the hardship of their brothers for the sake of Eretz Israel, and they would not budge until the land was completely conquered and divided. At that point they would settle down in peace.

However since they improperly presented their request to Moshe – for they said, "Do not bring us across the Jordan" – Hashem punished them: When Sennacherib exiled the 10 tribes from their land, the tribes of Gad and Reuven were the first to go into exile. Why? It is because they could have presented their request without saying: "Do not bring us across the Jordan," an expression which seemed to imply that they did not want to share in the hardship of the other tribes. Since they expressed themselves in this way, they were the first to be punished.

### Less Than 24 Hours

It is written, “Eleazar the *kohen* said to the men of war who went out to battle” (*Bamidbar* 31:21).

Why did Eleazar decide to speak to the men of war who “went out to battle,” giving them the laws regarding the *kashrut* of vessels captured in war? Would it not have been better for him to teach these laws to the soldiers who “returned from battle” with spoils in their hands? These were the ones who had to pay attention to all the laws of *kashering* and purifying vessels!

The book *Ohel Moed* gives a scholarly response to this question. The *Karti U’Palti* (*Yoreh Deah* 103) already asks why the Torah ordered the vessels of Midian to be *kashered* and immersed, since when something forbidden is absorbed by vessels for more than 24 hours, its flavor is worsened, and we know that “whatever imparts a worsened flavor is permitted by the Torah.” Now it seems that more than 24 hours had passed since the Children of Israel arrived in the desert upon returning from battle. In that case, why did the Torah order the Children of Israel to *kasher* the vessels they had obtained in battle?

The book replies that in reality, this order was primarily aimed at the men of war who went out to battle. They were being warned about situations in which, in the heat of battle, they had a desire to eat from out of the vessels of the Midianites, vessels that had already been used in the previous 24 hours. In such cases, these men were to abide by all the laws regarding their *kashering* and purification.

Hence in his warning, Eleazar only spoke to the men of war “who went out to battle,” meaning those likely to encounter such situations. He did not address those “who returned from battle,” for in that case the vessels of the Midianites would have already spent 24 hours without being used, and therefore this requirement no longer applied.

### Completely Pure

It is written, “Not a man among us is missing” (*Bamidbar* 31:49).

The Ramban states that this is something extraordinary, being among the great miracles that occurred to Israel. The Midianites were extremely numerous, and yet the Children of Israel killed and imprisoned tens of thousands of them, with not a single Israelite falling in battle. Hence the verse states, “Not a man among us is missing.”

If we were to ask why the Children of Israel merited such a great miracle, the Ramban replies: “Because they were completely pure.” This is what our Sages have said: “‘Not a man among us is missing’ – [going off] to commit a sin” (*Shabbat* 64a). Moshe said to them: “If so, what is this offering for?” They replied, “‘To make atonement for our souls’ [*Bamidbar* 31:50] – sinful thoughts of the heart.”

### Any Condition...

It is written, “We shall cross over, armed, before Hashem to the land of Canaan” (*Bamidbar* 32:32).

In the Talmud and among the *poskim*, numerous *halachot* have been decreed in the area of financial transactions. Our Sages have said that these are based upon the condition imposed by Moshe on the children of Gad and Reuven regarding the division of the

land among the tribes. The Mishnah states, “Any condition which is unlike the condition of the children of Gad and the children of Reuven is not a [valid] condition.”

In his book *Toaliyot HaRabag*, Rabbi Levi bar Gershon (the grandson of the Ramban), points out that it is “fitting for every man to give as many details as possible in a business transaction that he enters into with others, such that it becomes impossible for any trickery or deception to slip in. We find that in this regard, Moshe gave a very clear condition to the children of Gad and Reuven, going into great detail so that no trickery could possibly occur.”

### Completing the Hours

It is written, “Aaron was 123 years old upon his death on Mount Hor” (*Bamidbar* 33:39).

It seems that the expression “Mount Hor” is unnecessary, for the verse could have simply said: “Aaron was 123 years old upon his death.” What is it trying to tell us by this addition?

In his book *Panim Yafot*, Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz *Zatzal* answers this question by noting that the Sages have said that the verse, “I will fill the number of your days” (*Shemot* 23:26) teaches us that Hashem fills the years of the *tzaddikim* up to the very last day. This means that Hashem fills the years of the *tzaddikim* up to the exact date. For example, He completed the hours of Moshe, who was born on Adar 7 and died on Adar 7, even though he was already 120 years old on Adar 6. At the very same hour that he was born on Adar 7, he died on Adar 7.

This is what the verse means by stating, “Aaron was 123 years old upon his death on Mount Hor.” That is, upon his death “on Mount Hor,” the 123 years of his life had been completed.

## In the Light of the Parsha

### The Sin of Chillul Hashem is Atoned by Death!

It is written, “Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites” (*Bamidbar* 31:2).

We need to understand why Hashem ordered the Children of Israel to take vengeance themselves, rather than Hashem taking vengeance on Israel’s enemies. We may say that the Children of Israel committed a very grave sin, and although all the sinners among them died, their sin still caused a great upheaval within the community. There was also a grave *chillul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem’s Name) in the world, for it was obvious that all the nations rejoiced when Hashem’s people, who had received the Torah, committed such an abhorrent deed. Hence it was necessary for the Children of Israel themselves to fight against Midian and exact their vengeance on them. This would rectify their sin, and it would also silence the rumors about them that were spreading among the nations. Hashem’s Name would then be sanctified in the entire world, and as such the sin of *chillul Hashem* would be atoned.

Although the sin of *chillul Hashem* can only be atoned by a person’s death, as mentioned by the Gemara (*Yoma* 86a) and the Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 1:4), Rabbeinu Yona writes in *Sha’arei Teshuvah* that when a person sanctifies Hashem’s Name, he thereby atones for having committed the sin of *chillul Hashem*.

### Overcoming Anger

Within the Torah, there are three places where we find that Moshe became angry and was punished for having forgotten the Halachah. One of these places occurs in this week's *parsha*. The Children of Israel went to wage war against Midian, and when it was over, Moshe learned that those returning from battle had allowed the Midianite women to live, contrary to orders. He therefore became very angry, as it is written: "Moshe was angry with the officers of the army, with the officers of the thousands and the officers of the hundreds, who came from the battle" (*Bamidbar* 31:14).

The *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz *Zatzal* states that there is no doubt that Moshe's anger during the war with Midian was justified. In fact the objective of that war was to exact Hashem's vengeance on the Midianites, since the trap they had set for the Children of Israel was impossible to forgive. This trap had been set by the daughters of Midian, such that when the officers allowed the Midianite women to live, they had in fact brought this very same trap into Israel's camp.

Although Moshe, Israel's leader, was correct, he was still punished for having forgotten the Halachah. How so? It is because when someone is "punished" by having his wisdom leave him when he becomes angry, it is not punishment per se for the sin of anger. Rather, it is the natural result of anger. The reality is that anger "burns" the wisdom of one who becomes upset. Hence it makes no difference if anger is justified or not. In any case, the wisdom of a person who becomes angry disappears. Even Moshe, who was jealous for Hashem's honor, and whose sole intention was to save the community of Israel from sin, could not escape the destructive effects of anger.

The Gemara states the following:

"Resh Lakish said: As to every man who becomes angry, if he is a Sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him. If he is a Sage, his wisdom departs from him: [We learn this] from Moshe, for it is written: 'Moshe was angry with the officers of the army...' and it is written, 'Eleazar the *kohen* said to the men of war who went out to battle: This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe....' Hence it follows that it had been forgotten by Moshe" (*Pesachim* 66b).

Thus the way to overcome anger, says Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, is to study the teachings of the Sages who greatly spoke out against anger, as the Gemara tells us: "He who loses his temper is exposed to all the torments of Gehinnom" (*Nedarim* 22a). The Sages also said, "Whoever loses his temper will even ignore the *Shechinah*; he will forget his learning and increase in foolishness."

#### Simulated Anger

We have much to learn from the conduct of the great men of Israel, from their lofty character traits and the extreme measures they took to distance themselves from anger.

The greatest disciple of the Arizal, Rabbi Haim Vital, spoke out in his writings against anger. He testified to how the Arizal would behave in this regard, saying the following:

"My teacher *Zal* was very careful in terms of anger, more than all other sins, even when he became angry for a *mitzvah*. When I taught my brother, who did not know as much as I would have liked, and I would get upset with him, even then my teacher would greatly rebuke me. He justified such an attitude by saying, 'All

other sins produce a defect in a single member, but anger harms the entire soul and renders it impure.'"

It is said that the *gaon* Rabbi Israel Lipkin of Salant *Zatzal* (the "father of the Mussar movement"), was completely devoid of anger and never got carried away. He was very strict in regards to the obligation of completely eliminating grudges, and he would say: "Almost every sin between man and his fellowman stems from holding a grudge."

Nobody ever saw him angry or irritated in his life, despite the fact that he was a very emotional individual endowed with a sensitive soul. He had uprooted from his heart every trace of resentment and animosity, to the point that he was not even tempted to feel such emotions. If someone wronged or offended him, not only would he control himself and forgive the person, he would also strive to do him a favor in order to compensate for the harm that he had done to him.

Rabbi Israel Lipkin believed that this, in fact, is a positive Torah *mitzvah*: "You shall walk in His ways." A man is obligated to cleave to the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He. When we irritate Him, not only is He extremely patient, He also gives life to the person in question at the same time, and therefore grants him everything he needs and all that he asks for.

True, it sometimes happened, especially before the public, that Rabbi Israel seemed to get angry in order to reprimand an individual or community. However his anger was completely simulated. People sometimes noticed that in his "anger," he would turn his face to the wall and whisper to himself: "Anger of the face, not anger of the heart."

It is said that the *gaon* Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm *Zatzal* would never allow himself to become angry for any reason whatsoever, unless he first put on a garment specifically designated for that reason.

The *mashgiach* Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian *Zatzal* once said that he never corrected his children or others immediately upon seeing them do something bad, for he was afraid of scolding them excessively in anger. Hence he waited until he was certain that there was no anger in his heart, and only then would he reprimand and punish them.

It once happened that one of his children committed a grave mistake, and he waited 15 days until there was no longer any trace of anger in his heart. Only then did he punish him.

#### Tasting Leaven and Honey

Along the same lines, the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Israel, Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka *Zatzal*, would usually explain the verse "All leaven and all honey, you shall not burn of it" (*Vayikra* 2:11) in connection with anger. He said that "leaven" alludes to an irritated and annoyed face, and "honey" designates something sweet and enjoyable.

Whoever desires to become a complete man must know when to use "leaven" – a stern face, such as when he deals with sinners – and when he must use "honey" – such as when he deals with someone who is doing Hashem's will.

However a person who is "all leaven," who is completely fermented, and who displays a stern face even to those who observe Torah and *mitzvot* – or a person who is "all honey," meaning that he is completely gentle towards everyone, even those who forsake Torah – it is of such people that the verse states: "All leaven and all honey, you shall not burn of it as a fire offering to Hashem."

### Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Pano

“If you have not seen the lion, you have seen his lair.”

It was in this way, with this short phrase, that the *gaon* Rabbi Menachem Azariah *Zatzal* (or as he was better known, the “Rama of Pano”) was described by his contemporaries. This phrase expressed the respect and admiration that all the great Torah figures of the generation felt for him, from Pano in Italy to distant Poland. This giant among giants, the Rav of all the kabbalists from the Maghreb, had studied Kabbalah from the Arizal. He enlightened the earth and its inhabitants with the light of his pure teachings, which shined like diamonds, by tracing a clear and straight path in the sea of Kabbalah. Where we find his greatness, we also find his modesty and tremendous humility, such as it was expressed in his numerous writings. Thus for example, he would sign his name as: “I, the dust of the earth, whom the rabbis call *Mem Ayin*. This is my name in initials: *Ma’avir Avon* [who overlooks sin], and it is my remembrance: *Mohel Elbon* [who forgives insult].”

Rabbi Menachem Azariah descended from a pure and holy line. He was born in 5308 to Rabbi Yitzchak Berachia, who was from one of the noblest families in Israel, the princes of Pano. While still young, he was already being called a man in whom the spirit of G-d dwelled by virtue of his wisdom, his intelligence, and his Torah understanding – in general and in all its details – both in the revealed Torah and Kabbalah. There was nothing that he had not reflected upon in order to understand as deeply as possible, and his wisdom surpassed that of the entire Orient. He understood physics, astronomy, and philosophy, from which he took the best in order to further his understanding of all the Torah’s treasures.

When Rabbi Menachem Azariah reached the age of marriage, he wed the daughter of the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Pava of Mantua, who was known as a complete man by virtue of his Torah, wisdom, piety, and lofty character traits. Rabbi Yitzchak also excelled in kindness and generosity, and his home was open to everyone. He liberally distributed money for everything having to do with sanctity. In the responsa of the Rama, we find an answer addressed to a Torah scholar who disagreed with Rabbi Yitzchak Pava. The Rama attempted to convince him to forgo his own opinion in favor of the Torah view as expressed by his father-in-law: “Even when he is lenient while the entire world is strict, it is fitting to listen to him. How much more when he is strict and with good reason!”

Rabbi Menachem Azariah remained with Rabbi Yitzchak Pava of Mantua for a few years, during which time he studied with his father-in-law and absorbed the Talmud and *poskim*. At the same time, he began to tackle the subject

of Kabbalah with the help of his uncle the kabbalist Rabbi Ezra of Pano *Zatzal*, towards whom he felt gratitude for his entire life. Of him he said, “By the merit of my teacher Rabbi Ezra of Pano and his righteousness, he brought me into the garden of this marvelous wisdom during my youth.”

### The Image Disappeared

In his book *Assara Ma’amarot*, the Rama gives an interesting explanation for the contradiction between the words of the Midrash and the Zohar regarding the day that Moshe died. In the Midrash, it is said that Moshe wrote 13 Torah scrolls on the day of his death, whereas the Zohar states that he died during *Mincha* of Shabbat. The Rama states that the death of Moshe began, in earnest, on the eve of Shabbat. At that point, “His image and likeness below disappeared.” On that same day, he indeed wrote 13 Torah scrolls, while during *Mincha* of Shabbat, it was the image above that disappeared.

Rabbi Menachem Azariah established numerous customs in his community, some of which have remained with Jewish communities to this day. His disciple, the author of *Ma’avar Yabok*, Rabbi Aaron Berachia of Modena *Zatzal*, wrote that because of him, the custom of rising each morning at sunrise to recite *Selichot* spread to Venice. The Rama was the first in everything pertaining to sanctity. As a result, many individuals among the Jewish communities of Italy began to arise every day at sunset. He is also credited with the custom of reading the entire book of Psalms three times while engaging in a *ta’anit dibbur* (fast of speech) during the *Shovavim* period. The *segula* of this reading is that one who practices it is considered to have fasted 65,600 times.

The amazing life of Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Pano came to an end on Av 4 in the year 5380. He was 72 years old at the time of his passing.

## Guard Your Tongue!

### Even All His Possessions

Even if a person realizes that he will incur a significant loss by not engaging in *Rechilus* [talebearing], it is still forbidden. For example, if his employer will fire him unless he engages in *Rechilus*, he is still forbidden to do so. Not engaging in *Rechilus* is included among the negative prohibitions, for which one must lose all his possessions in order not to violate, as explained in the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 157:1.

– Chafetz Chaim